DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 535 CS 007 136

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TITLE Motivational Strategies for Reading Independently.
PUB DATE Dec 83
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
JOURNAL CIT Reading Teacher; v37 n3 p331-2 Dec 1983

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; *Independent Reading; *Motivation Techniques; *Positive Reinforcement; Reading Interests; Reading Material Selection; Recreational Reading; *Student Motivation
IDENTIFIERS Book Exchange; PF Project

ABSTRACT

The importance of independent reading is advocated for success both in school and out of school. The following four strategies are presented to stimulate children's interest in reading and to assist the teacher in providing an environment in which independent reading becomes a student practice: (1) provide opportunities for students to see, hear, and share reading experiences; (2) provide students with tools for becoming adept at choosing their own reading materials; (3) emphasize topics that interest and excite the children; and (4) have a book swap among the children. It is indicated that children need to share the reading experience with adults and peers for it to become meaningful and inspirational.

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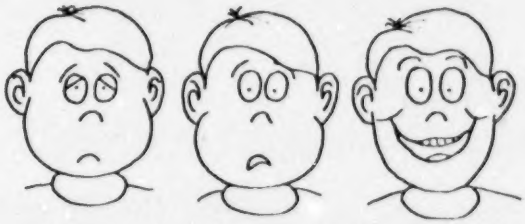

Motivation

Send comments or suggestions for "Motivation" directly to Gail Garber, Principal, Pine Road School, Lower Moreland, Pennsylvania 19006, USA.

Motivational strategies for reading independently

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Students usually catch on quickly to the fact that reading is the key to success in school. However, they should understand that the ultimate goal of learning to read is not simply to get stars on reading papers. They need to know that reading will become even more useful out of school, both for informational and recreational purposes. Therefore, it is just as crucial for us to help children develop skill in independent reading as it is to teach word attack and comprehension.

For students to become inspired to be independent readers, they need to have an interest to satisfy. They should also feel successful when they read – if children don't feel good about reading, they are hardly likely to become independent readers. Independent reading should always lead to feelings of self-worth, and always be accompanied by positive reinforcement from the teacher.

The following strategies stimulate children's interest and insure your success in providing an environment where independent reading becomes a student aspiration.

Strategy 1. For students to read independently, they must believe reading is not just an assignment associated with schoolwork, but a worthwhile lifetime activity. Children need to see adults (you) read, and they need to hear adults (you) speak enthusiastically about what they read.

Provide opportunities for students to see, hear, and share reading experiences. Students need (1) to see you read for pleasure; (2) to hear you speak with enthusiasm about things you have read; and (3) to have opportunities to share their responses to reading with you and their classmates. Sharing spontaneously what they have read affords students a "moment in the sun" which fosters self-confidence and self-respect. Simultaneously, they spark each other's interests in reading. Setting aside time daily for sustained silent reading and responding to these literary

CS007136

THE READING TEACHER; v37 n3
p331-2 December 1983

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experiences gives independent reading an important place in the lives of adults and children alike.

Strategy 2. It is essential that independent reading be a success if appreciation is to flourish. Provide students with the tools for becoming adept at choosing their own reading material. The "5-finger test" is an excellent tool. Here's how children do it.

(1) They read a page of the book that they are considering.

(2) As they read, they put up one finger each time they meet an unfamiliar word.

(3) They stop at the end of the page and count how many fingers they have used. If they used less than 5 fingers, that's a good book for independent reading. If they have used 5 or more, they know that the book is probably too difficult to read on their own.

(4) If the first book was too hard, they select another book and use the same 5-finger test on one page in it.

Strategy 3. Plant a seed: Emphasize a topic that interests and excites the children. When working in a content area, give students a list of books on that study unit's subject. Have the books available in the classroom. Just set up a display, generate interest in the topic, and let students become self-motivated to read independently on the subject.

Strategy 4. Have a Book Swap! Have students bring in their favorite books to exchange with classmates. Allow them to conduct their own lend/lease program. (Borrow some yourself—there are bound to be some good ones.) The borrowers have the assurance that a classmate has endorsed a book, and the lenders have the satisfaction of turning a friend on to a treasured selection. Like pen pals, book pals will develop, carrying the exchange program throughout the year. The students are given the freedom, and the responsibility, for becoming inspired independent readers.

These strategies can maximize the opportunities and incentives for students to become motivated to read independently. Children need to share the reading experience with adults and peers for it to be meaningful and inspirational. We can inspire our students to become learners for a lifetime through involvement in the art and skill of independent reading.